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SUBJECT: WESTERN IRAQ UPDATE

SUMMARY

1. According to IRC, there is no public health emergency in either Karbala or An Najaf governorates, but local residents are suffering from chronic, preventable health problems. The DART met with a health representative from Babil to discuss ways to solve emergency health problems in Al Hillah, specifically remedying poor sanitation conditions at the pediatric hospital, and resolving an essential drug shortage. On the food side, according to WFP, Al Hillah has abundant amounts of flour in the market, but most Iraqis are unable to afford this commodity at current prices.

IRC IN AL HILLAH

2. In An Najaf, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has assessed 50 of the governorate's 59 compact water units and found that most need restoration or replacement. In Karbala, IRC said the governorate's 42 units were in better condition. After consultation with An Najaf governorate water officials, IRC decided to request funds from its cooperative agreement with the DART to help improve the faulty rural water systems.

3. "We haven't found any public health emergency," IRC said of its findings in Karbala and An Najaf governorates. However, IRC did find people suffering from preventable, chronic health problems, and said it would like to address them in its cooperative agreement plan. It will focus its efforts in rural areas, concentrating on maternal child health, community health workers, TBAs, health education and hygiene, and enhanced pediatric screening. IRC would also support communicable disease surveillance and rural immunization campaigns, noting that the war disrupted the cold chain in some places. IRC said there was no evidence of cholera or typhoid, and that it was unclear whether seasonal diarrhea rates had increased. However, IRC said there might be some cases of cholera outside of Karbala.

4. One major problem that IRC encountered was the lack of therapeutic milk in pediatric hospitals in An Najaf and Karbala. Infant formula was being used as an alternative, although, according to the IRC health specialist, this was not a good substitute.

WFP IN AL HILLAH

5. The DART confirmed on 19 May that Coalition forces have vacated the main food warehouse in Al Hillah. However, the warehouse remains under the Coalition security. Wakil (public distribution agents) trucks continue to pick up the September/October distribution as directed by the Ministry of Trade (MOT) and as agreed to by WFP. The distributions are being made to supplement earlier distributions that were deficient in some food items.

6. The DART met with WFP national staff in the designated WFP office space at the compound. Neither the WFP nor the MOT office spaces are in acceptable condition, and both offices are in need of clean up, refurbishment, office furniture, computers and supplies.

7. At the request of MOT warehouse staff, front gate military security presently allow two trucks at a time into the compound. Although security is willing to allow more than two trucks, MOT warehouse staff stated that they did

not have the personnel to process more than two trucks at a time. Approximately 30 trucks per day are receiving commodities from the compound. Trucks normally arrive at the compound throughout the morning and continue arriving until about 1400 hours.

18. According to WFP staff, current distributions include flour, rice, sugar, vegetable oil white beans, detergent, soap, tea, salt, and infant formula. They do not have stocks of adult milk or weaning cereal, and they are low in vegetable oil stocks. WFP said that MOT would eventually be responsible for providing warehouse compound security. Until that time, Coalition forces will be required to secure the front gate and inspect in-coming vehicles.

19. WFP stated that Al Hillah has abundant amounts of flour in the market; however, most Iraqis are unable to afford this commodity at current prices.

10. WFP officials said they had seen the MOT database for Al Hillah and have discussed procedures to process any possible beneficiaries who have not been registered or who have lost their ration cards. MOT will re-register all beneficiaries that have been removed from the rolls or lost their ration cards. These individuals will receive rations at the time of distributions. The DART will confirm the specifics of these procedures with MOT.

PAYROLL AND SECURITY UPDATES FROM CMOC

11. The DART participated in the Babil Governorate Support Team (GST) meeting on 19 May in Al Hillah and received a briefing on a scheme to slowly return the task of paying salaries to the municipalities. Bank disbursement managers from all governorates will pay salaries via banks as they had before the war. The Coalition military will transport the funds to each governorate through June, and hopes to turn over disbursement duties to the governorates in time for the July payroll.

12. A Coalition official announced that military police (MP) would soon begin a four-day course for police training. The MPs will train a total of 600 police officers for Al Hillah, and will follow up by carrying out joint patrols. The GST also announced that it was starting a tracking chart of all humanitarian projects in Babil.

MEETING WITH BABIL CIVIL AFFAIRS HEALTH OFFICIAL

13. The DART met with the Babil GST health representative to discuss ways to solve emergency health problems in Al Hillah, specifically remedying poor sanitation conditions at the pediatric hospital, and resolving an essential drug shortage. The GST official reported that 70 armed men entered Al Hillah's general hospital on 18 May and demanded that patients receive high-quality care. Looting was not a motive, and details were sketchy. However, there was gunfire in the hospital and two or three people were injured. Doctors there threatened to walk out unless security was improved. Two nights ago, there was a report of someone throwing a grenade over the entrance gate of the pediatric hospital. Doctors at the pediatric hospital told the DART that many resident doctors lived at the hospital rather than risk commuting from their homes. The Babil Ministry of Health identified 72 residents to undergo the upcoming "mini" police training and to serve as security police for Al Hillah health facilities. Coalition forces carry out periodic patrols at Al Hillah hospitals, but do not provide permanent security for them.

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